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Religious encounters on the southern Egyptian frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298-642)

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8. Philae and the Missions to Nubia

Byzantine Missions of the Sixth Century

Ever since the reign of the Emperor Constantine, the Christian mission had been part of imperial ideology.¹⁵ With the adoption of the Hellenistic concept of the *basileus*, the Christian emperors were regarded as God's representatives on earth, one of whose tasks it was to spread Christianity within the imperial frontiers, and beyond.¹⁶ At first, the emperor was not directly involved, as in the mission of Frumentius to Axum. It was only in the sixth century that the Emperor Justin I (518-527) and, especially, his successor and nephew Justinian, began to integrate imperial missions into foreign policy.¹⁷

Whereas in earlier centuries the Roman emperors had tried to bring foreign peoples inside the Roman world, Justinian acted more prominently in Christian terms as the central person who made this inclusiveness possible.¹⁸ The works of two authors to be discussed in this chapter, the historian Procopius and the church historian John of Ephesus, include passages on imperial policy regarding the southern Egyptian, 'Nubian' frontier. We will see how both authors write about missionary activities from a different angle owing to the different purposes of their works, and how the 'Nubia passages' fit in.¹⁹ We will start our inquiry with Procopius.

In his *Wars*, which were finished around 550/551 and contain the *Persian Wars* (two books), the *Vandal Wars* (two books) and the *Gothic Wars* (four books, the last of which was published around 552), Procopius included several accounts of peoples living near the Black Sea.²⁰ These peoples have in common that they converted to Christianity in the reign of Justinian in connection with imperial policy towards the Persians. The Caucasian kingdoms were situated in a mountainous area that was hard to control and thus was one of the hotbeds in the wars between the Roman and Persian Empires.²¹ It is worthwhile summarising these accounts in order to see how Procopius depicts the imperial missionary activities.

In the first account, Justinian provided the Heruli with fertile lands and other possessions. He persuaded them to become Christians and allies of the Romans: 'As a result of this they adopted a gentler manner of life and decided to submit themselves wholly to the laws of the Christians'.²² Nevertheless, they did not behave as good allies and violated their neighbours. Procopius illustrates this unruly behaviour by

¹⁵ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 90-3.

¹⁶ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background*, 2 vols (Washington, 1966) 2.611-850; J.A.S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian. The Circumstances of Imperial Power* (London, 1996) 58-65.

¹⁷ H.-G. Beck, *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (London, 1972) Ch. IV ('Christliche Mission und politische Propaganda im byzantinischen Reich', 1967'); Engelhardt, *Mission*, J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London and New York, 1994) 141-3; G.B. Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century', in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Reign of Justinian* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ M. Maas, "'Delivered from Their Ancient Customs": Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography', in K. Mills, A. Grafton (eds), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester NY, 2003) 152-88 at 159-60.

¹⁹ Several of the examples mentioned here are treated by Engelhardt, *Mission*, and Cameron, *Procopius*, 120-6. English translations of Procopius' works are taken from Dewing's Loeb edition.

²⁰ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 22a-5; Cameron, *Procopius*, 122-3. On the date of Procopius' *Wars* see Cameron, *Procopius*, xii, 8; G. Greatrex, 'The Dates of Procopius' Works', *BMGS* 18 (1994) 101-14, *Rome and Persia at War: 502-532* (Leeds, 1998) 62, and 'Recent Work on Procopius and the Composition of *Wars VIII*', *BMGS* 27 (2003) 45-67.

²¹ On the politics concerning this frontier area, see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 232-4; D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity. A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC-AD 562* (Oxford, 1994) 268-314; Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East'.

²² Procop. *Goth.* 2.14.34.

mentioning that the Heruli used to mate with asses.²³ Procopius also places the conversion story of the Tzani in the reign of Justinian. They were paid annually by the Byzantine government but continued to raid the country. Consequently, they were defeated by a Byzantine general, became soldiers in the Byzantine army and converted to Christianity, or in the words of Procopius: ‘they changed their means of life to one of a more civilised sort’.²⁴

In the third passage, Procopius relates the conversion of the Abasgi: ‘these barbarians even down to my time have worshipped groves and forests; for with a sort of barbarian simplicity they supposed the trees were gods’.²⁵ They deposed their two kings, who had the cruel custom of selling boys from their own people as eunuchs to the Romans, and converted to Christianity: ‘But during the reign of the present Emperor Justinian the Abasgi have changed everything and adopted a more civilised standard of life’.²⁶ However, because they felt they were suppressed by the regulations of the Byzantine army, they later reinstated their kings and chose the side of the Persians. Justinian again sent one of his generals, who quashed the resistance of the Abasgi in battle.²⁷

Procopius here writes in the classical ethnographical tradition, in which in a recurrent pattern he describes other peoples as ‘barbarians’, who can be subdued only by violence and are untrustworthy as allies. On the other hand, he also follows imperial propaganda, in which Justinian is seen as the agent of ‘civilisation’ by bringing Christianity to these foreign peoples.²⁸

In his *Buildings* (c. 552), Procopius also describes the conversion of the Tzani.²⁹ The *Buildings* is a panegyric work about Justinian’s building policy and emphasises the imperial ideology of Justinian as the bringer of Christianity:³⁰ ‘They immediately changed their belief to piety, all of them becoming Christians, and they altered their manner of life to a milder way’.³¹ Out of fear that the Tzani would slide back into their previous ‘barbarian’ behaviour, Justinian took several measures, among them the building of a church.³² In this passage, the propagandistic message is apparent throughout, whereas in the *Wars* more attention is paid to the political circumstances of Justinian’s missionary activities.³³

Procopius reports more missionary activities in North Africa in the sixth book of his *Buildings*.³⁴ Firstly, in Boreium, a city to the west of the Pentapolis in Libya, a Jewish ‘sanctuary’ (νεώσ) that was believed to have been built by Solomon still flourished in Justinian’s time.³⁵ The emperor converted the population and transformed the building into a church.³⁶ In the Libyan Desert south of Boreium, two cities of the same name, Augila, possessed temples dedicated to Ammon and Alexander the Great, in which cults flourished until Justinian’s reign. The emperor taught them Christianity, converted the entire population and built a church of St

²³ Procop. *Goth.* 2.14.33-6. A contemporary writer, John Malalas, gives another account of the conversion of the Heruli. According to him, the king of the Heruli came to Constantinople to be baptised. See Malalas, pp. 427-8 Dindorf, and for similar stories pp. 412-3, 431 Dindorf.

²⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.15.20-5.

²⁵ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.14.

²⁶ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.18.

²⁷ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.12-21, 9.10-30.

²⁸ For the Tzani in Procopius’ *Wars* see Maas, “‘Delivered from Their Ancient Customs’”, 161-3.

²⁹ Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.1-14. On the date, see Cameron, *Procopius* 9-12, 85-6; Greatrex, ‘Dates of Procopius’ Works’, *Rome and Persia*, 62, and ‘Recent Work’, 49-52.

³⁰ Cameron, *Procopius* 84-112.

³¹ Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.7.

³² Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.12.

³³ On the Tzani in the *Buildings* see Maas, “‘Delivered from Their Ancient Customs’”, 163-7.

³⁴ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 25-7; Cameron, *Procopius* 89, 123-4.

³⁵ For synagogues as religious institutions with a sacred status, see L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, 2000) 281.

³⁶ Procop. *Aed.* 6.2.21-3.

Mary Theotokos.³⁷ Justinian also converted the population of the city of Kidame, which from of old had been at peace with the Romans. They adopted Christianity voluntarily.³⁸ Next comes the city of Lepcis Magna which was in ruins and had been largely covered with desert sand. Justinian rebuilt the part of the city that was not covered, and among other building activities he constructed a church for, again, St Mary Theotokos and four other churches.³⁹ He also converted a people living close by, the Gadabitani, and built a church in another city.⁴⁰

Procopius' accounts of these missionary activities give the impression of a world in which 'barbarians' readily converted to Christianity through the agency of Justinian. In the *Wars*, these activities are connected with foreign politics, but in the *Buildings* they almost entirely conform to the ideal of the emperor as bringer of Christianity. In this way, Procopius followed Byzantine imperial propaganda, in which conversion was seen as an instrument of Byzantine control. For Procopius, the missionary activities were therefore closely linked to imperial politics and showed that 'spreading the faith' implied more than spreading faith alone: it also involved the spreading of Byzantine culture and ideology, and in this way of its control.⁴¹

John of Ephesus, for whom a few introductory words seem appropriate, gave a different picture of these missionary activities. He was born around 507 in the Ingilene near Amida, a city on another frontier of the Byzantine Empire, the eastern, Mesopotamian frontier.⁴² In his youth, John joined a monastery in Amida where he experienced the persecutions of the Monophysite movement. He was soon ordained a deacon and travelled several times to Antioch, to the monasteries of Scetis in Egypt and to Constantinople to meet famous ascetics. In 540, he went to Constantinople a second time and became an abbot of a monastery near the capital. Two years later, supported by the emperor, he started missionary activities in the countryside of Asia Minor, where he claimed to have converted 70,000 people. He was ordained bishop of Ephesus in, probably, 558, and soon became one of the advisors of Theodosius, the exiled Patriarch of Alexandria and leader of the Monophysites.

After Theodosius' death, in 566, John was the main representative of the Monophysite community at Constantinople. He was involved in disputes within the movement and, in 571, with the Emperor Justin II (565-578) himself. Building upon John's contacts at court in his period as a missionary in Asia Minor, Justinian and later Justin II had called on him to mediate in disputes with the Monophysites. When Justin changed his course of diplomacy and followed a more rigid path, John was banished to one of the Princes' Islands near Constantinople. Uncertain times followed. In 580, John briefly played a role in a Monophysite conflict concerning the Patriarch Paul of Antioch, but from 581 until his death, no more is heard of him. Shortly after 588 John died, according to a spurious account of him having been a prisoner in, ironically, Chalcedon for over a year.

John's extant works reflect his chequered monastic and ecclesiastical career. During the second half of the 560s, he wrote a series of Syrian saints' lives, the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, which contain references to the years 566, 567 and 568, but did not receive a final redaction.⁴³ Shortly before Justin's persecutions of the Monophysites in 571, John completed the first two parts of his *Church History* covering the period until the sixth year of the reign of Justin II (571). The aim of the *Church History* was to provide a history of the Monophysite movement, in which John claimed that the

³⁷ Procop. *Aed.* 6.2.14-20.

³⁸ Procop. *Aed.* 6.3.9-12.

³⁹ Procop. *Aed.* 6.4.1-5.

⁴⁰ Procop. *Aed.* 6.4.12-3.

⁴¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 123.

⁴² J.J. van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus. A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Diss. Groningen, 1995) 27-37; S. Ashbrook Harvey, H. Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', *RAC* XVIII (1998) 553-64 at 553-5. On the location of Amida, see Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 21.

⁴³ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 42.

movement represented the true orthodox church, despite the imperial support for a different doctrine. The first two parts of the *Church History* end relatively optimistically with the attempts by Justin to come closer to the Monophysites. However, disappointed by the persecutions from 571 onwards, John decided to write an 'afterthought', the third part of the *Church History*, on which he was still writing in 588. The third part is therefore much more personal and partisan than the first and second parts, and supports the 'Monophysite cause' even more.⁴⁴

Although both were prominent figures at the Byzantine court Procopius and John differed in their public, the genre of their works and the intention with which they wrote them. John wrote in Syriac for a Monophysite, Syriac speaking public; Procopius for the Greek-speaking elite. John wrote hagiography and ecclesiastical history; Procopius history and panegyric. Finally, John wanted to emphasise that Monophysitism was the true, orthodox faith; Procopius wrote from the imperial, orthodox point of view. These differences of approach should be kept in mind when we give some examples of the missionary activities told by John of Ephesus in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*

One of these examples is the account of Simeon the Mountaineer, an anchorite who went to a desolate area in the mountains on the Euphrates and stayed there for 26 years to civilise and reconvert the lapsed population to Christianity.⁴⁵ Another example is the account about John of Hephaestopolis. He was a Syrian, but the Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria ordained him bishop of Hephaestopolis in Egypt. Upon an invitation from the emperor, he accompanied the patriarch to Constantinople and was forced to stay there. After having been banished with Theodosius, he pretended to be ill and requested to return to the capital, where he ordained new priests. When some of his antagonists noticed this, John retreated to a villa in the countryside, allegedly for reasons of health but in reality to get out of town. John journeyed to Asia Minor and Syria and ordained even more people. The Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch heard of this affair and complained to the emperor. Meanwhile, John managed to return to the villa, and the Empress Theodora protected him by stating that John had not left the building. When this incident had blown over, John applied the same trick by asking for treatment for his disease at a hot spring. He journeyed to Asia Minor on another occasion, where he again ordained many new priests.⁴⁶ The last example consists of the missionary activities of James Bar'adai (Jacob Baradaeus). At the request of Arab tribes to send bishops, Theodosius sent James Bar'adai and Theodore of Arabia, who ordained many clerics.⁴⁷

These examples are different from the foreign, 'barbarian' peoples converted to Christianity as related by Procopius. The emperor does not play the central role, rather clergymen take the initiative. The first example is about an anchorite who starts his missionary activities in a remote area of the Byzantine Empire. The other examples are about two champions of Monophysitism, who help to spread the Monophysite church within the empire. John of Ephesus had met John of Hephaestopolis in Asia Minor around 542 and Bar'adai ordained him bishop of Ephesus in 558.⁴⁸ In between, John performed his own missionary activities in Asia Minor. Whereas the first example

⁴⁴ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus* 38-101; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 555-6. For the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* see also S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, 1990).

⁴⁵ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 16 Brooks (*PO* 17, pp. 229-47). Cf. Engelhardt, *Mission*, 158; Ashbrook-Harvey, *Asceticism*, 94-7.

⁴⁶ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 25 Brooks (*PO* 18, pp. 526-40). On John of Hephaestopolis, see E. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VI^e siècle* (Leuven, 1951); Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 287-8; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 150-3; Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism*, 103-4.

⁴⁷ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 50 Brooks (*PO* 19, pp. 153-8). On James Bar'adai see Honigmann, *Évêques*, 168-77; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 284-7; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 90-100; Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism*, 105-7.

⁴⁸ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus* 30, 32.

illustrates the virtues of a Syrian saint, the other examples witness the construction of a Monophysite hierarchy.

A structural analysis of the accounts of Byzantine missions during the reigns of Justin I and Justinian divides the missionary stories into three categories: missions the emperor initiated, missions under the imperial aegis but without the direct involvement of the emperor, and missions organised independently of the emperor.⁴⁹ According to this analysis, the more independent the missions were, the more religiously inspired and the more Monophysite they were. Although these divisions provide insight into the different ways that such stories are structured, the analysis raises the question of whether they adequately describe Byzantine missions. For example, if the missionaries are driven by religious zeal, it is in most cases Monophysitism that drives them. But were Chalcedonians then less involved in these missions?⁵⁰

The answer seems evident from the above analysis, namely that the representation that Monophysites were mainly involved in Byzantine missions is a bias in our sources. Procopius tells us about missionary activities among foreign peoples, and basically follows imperial propaganda, though he may sometimes criticise it in his *Wars*. Consequently, he refrains from statements about internal, doctrinal disagreements.⁵¹ For John of Ephesus this is different. In the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, he tells us about missionary activities not among foreign peoples, but within the empire itself. These accounts have an outspokenly personal character, which is partly determined by the genre of the work, hagiography. But it also gives John the opportunity to present two of the champions of the Monophysite church and their struggle for the Monophysite cause.

The focus of these accounts on Monophysitism says more about their agendas than that they display a realistic picture of Byzantine missions. For Justinian, missionary activities meant the spread of Christian culture, and therewith Byzantine control. If a person came to the emperor with a proposal for missionary activities, or the emperor chose a missionary, it did not always matter if this person was Monophysite or Chalcedonian. In the case of John of Ephesus himself, the emperor supported his mission to Asia Minor fully, although he was, at that time, a prominent Monophysite abbot. And results there were, as John lists his many converts.⁵² Apparently, these results were more important to the emperor than disputes over doctrine.

John of Ephesus describes missionary activities among foreign peoples only in the passages about Nubia, and only in the third part of the *Church History* which is most clearly written with a Monophysite agenda. Rather than ascribing the characteristics of these accounts to a certain type of mission, we will therefore approach the missionary stories from the viewpoint of the author and his audience, just as we have done with the *Life of Aaron*. This approach may perhaps provide a better understanding of Byzantine missions in general, and imperial involvement in Nubian affairs in particular, as described by both Procopius and John of Ephesus.

Procopius' Nubia Passage in Context

In Part I, we discussed the passage on Diocletian's withdrawal of the southern frontier and the closure of the temples at Philae at length. Let us now look at the wider context

⁴⁹ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 178-86. Cf. the summary by O. Mazal, *Justinian I. und seine Zeit. Geschichte und Kultur des Byzantinischen Reiches im 6. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2001) 242-52.

⁵⁰ A question Engelhardt, *Mission*, 182-3, himself poses.

⁵¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 124-5.

⁵² Cf. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 1-4; M. Whitby, 'John of Ephesus and the Pagans: Pagan Survivals in the Sixth Century', in M. Salamon (ed.), *Paganism in the Later Roman Empire and in Byzantium* (Cracow, 1991) 111-31; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 561-3.

of this passage to explain why Procopius included this intermezzo in his *Wars*.⁵³ In chapters 19 and 20 of book I of the *Persian Wars*, Procopius relates the efforts of Justinian to win over the Homeritae (Himyarites) and the 'Ethiopians', that is, the Axumites, to the Byzantine side against the Persian Empire.⁵⁴ However, before he relates these efforts, Procopius first describes, in an ethnographical digression, where these remote peoples live.

The Homeritae and Axumites lived on either side of the Red Sea, the Homeritae on the Arabian Peninsula (modern Yemen) and the Axumites on the African mainland. Procopius describes the many peoples that live around the Homeritae, generally called 'Saracens', and leaves the impression of a desolate and 'barbarian' land.⁵⁵ En passant, he relates how a certain Abocharabus bestowed upon Justinian a country consisting solely of palm trees, in return for which the emperor gave him the phylarchate over all Saracens in the area.⁵⁶ Procopius then turns to the Axumites and their position with respect to the Homeritae.⁵⁷ Finally, he explains the remarkable nature of the ships sailing between Axum and India.⁵⁸

Rather unexpectedly, Procopius here adds a further digression, in which he accounts how far Axum is removed from 'the Egyptian boundaries of Roman sovereignty'.⁵⁹ Just as in the digression on Abocharabus, it also gives him the opportunity to relate previous imperial policy concerning the country. As we have seen, the historian here digs deep into the past, as he wants to emphasise that the 'extreme parts of Roman sovereignty' formerly went further south, until Diocletian withdrew the Roman frontier to Elephantine in 298.⁶⁰ Diocletian also paid the Blemmyes and Noubades an annual amount of money, but the 'barbarians' were untrustworthy as they continued raiding. Moreover, the emperor allowed them to have priests on the island of Philae and ratified the treaty there. After a brief remark about the religion of the peoples, notably about the Blemmyes sacrificing human beings to the sun, Procopius returns to the present day by stating that Justinian ordered his general Narses to 'destroy' the temples at Philae.

The scene of the closure of the temples in Justinian's reign forms a natural transition to the main line of the story, for religious motivations also play an important role in the next scene.⁶¹ Here Procopius accounts an intervention by the Axumite king Hellestheaeus (known from other sources as Ella Asbeha), who was a Christian, against the Homeritic king, who was a Jew (Dhu Nawas), because the latter was persecuting the Christians there.⁶² After the intervention, a Christian vassal king, Esimiphaeus (Simyaf'a Ashw'a), was on the throne, and the Homeritae had to pay tribute to the Axumites. Not much later, the Homeritae revolted and Esimiphaeus was replaced by a certain Abramus (Abraha), who was also a Christian, but hostile to the Axumites (530/531). Hellestheaeus sent two expeditions against the Homeritae but, as both were unsuccessful, he did not send more.

Now, in the time that Hellestheaeus and his vassal Esimiphaeus were still kings, Justinian sent a diplomatic mission to them under a certain Julian (again in 530 or

⁵³ Thus far only attempted by Cameron, *Procopius*, 121-2.

⁵⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.1.

⁵⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.1-16. On the Saracens see e.g. Mayerson, *Monks*, 322-6 ('The Word Saracen (Cαρακηνός) in the Papyri', 1989'), and Graf, *Arabian Frontier*, Ch. IX at 14-5.

⁵⁶ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.7-13.

⁵⁷ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.17-26.

⁵⁸ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.23-6.

⁵⁹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.27 (τὰ ἐπ' Αἰγύπτου ὄρια τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς).

⁶⁰ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.28 (τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς).

⁶¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 122.

⁶² According to Malalas, pp. 433-4 Dindorf, who reports about the same event, the Axumite king declared war on the Homerites after they had killed some Roman merchants. The king stated that if he won, he would convert to Christianity. So it turned out, and he asked Justinian for a bishop and clerics to baptise and teach him.

531, so the mission must have taken place shortly before Abramus' revolt).⁶³ The emperor asked them to make common cause against the Persians 'on account of their community of religion'.⁶⁴ The Axumites would take over the silk trade to India from the Persians, while the Homeritae would launch an attack on Persia. Both kings agreed to this rather bold proposal, but neither did what was asked of him. Similarly, the later king of the Homeritae, Abramus, promised Justinian to invade Persia several times but never did so.⁶⁵ Such, then, were the relations of Justinian with the Homeritae and Axumites.

By describing the country of these peoples, and the land between Axum and Egypt, Procopius stresses the 'barbarian' character of the peoples on the fringes of the Roman world, culminating in their untrustworthiness as allies of the Romans, even if they were Christians. The description of the Blemmyes, who sacrificed human beings to the sun, compares well with the preceding ethnographical descriptions of the lands of the Axumites and the Homeritae, beyond whom, for example, live cannibalistic Saracens.⁶⁶ The explicit statement that the Blemmyes and Noubades did not keep to the treaty of Diocletian also serves to underline the untrustworthiness of the 'barbarians'. In this respect, it can be seen as an illustration of the later behaviour of the Homeritae and Axumites in connection with Justinian's foreign policy against Persia.

The digression is also a nice parallel for other missionary activities in the reign of Justinian as reported in Procopius' *Wars* and *Buildings*. Procopius not only stereotypes the Blemmyes and Noubades as 'barbarians', he also underscores Justinian's ideological position as bringer of civilisation. The emperor made an end to Blemmyan and Noubadian worship at Philae, and sent his general to destroy the temples. The difference, however, with the other accounts is that Justinian does not bring Christianity. It is not stated that he converted the Blemmyes and Noubades, as in the accounts in the *Wars*, nor does he convert the temples into churches or built new churches, as in the *Buildings*. Nevertheless, the account about the closure of the temples confirms the hypothesis posed earlier on the basis of epigraphical evidence, namely that it reflects imperial propaganda.⁶⁷

John of Ephesus' Nubia Passages in Context

Missionary activities further south consisted of the Christian missions to Nubia, as told by John of Ephesus. They cover chapters 6-9 and 49-53 of book 4 of the third part of John's *Church History*.⁶⁸ The first five chapters of this book have not been transmitted, except for their very end, which relates the death of Theodosius of Alexandria (566). Since it is clear from the sequel that book 4 concentrates on internal disputes within the Monophysite Church and relates the events chronologically, the

⁶³ *PLRE* III s.v. 'Iulianus 8'.

⁶⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.20.9 (διὰ τὸ τῆς δόξης ὁμόγνωμον).

⁶⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.20.1-13. For the historical background to Justinian's appeal to the Homeritae and Axumites, see Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 225-39; Brakmann, "'Axomis (Aksum)'", 753-62.

⁶⁶ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.15.

⁶⁷ Cf. Cameron, *Procopius*, 89, who mentions the closure of the temple of Ammon at Augila, which was probably also for show.

⁶⁸ There is an occasionally unreliable English translation by R. Payne-Smith, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus* (Oxford, 1860) 250-9 and 315-27, one in German by J.M. Schönfelder, *Die Kirchengeschichte des Johannes von Ephesus* (Munich, 1862) 141-7 and 180-8, and one in Latin by E.W. Brooks, *Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia. II: Versio* (= *CSCO* 106; Paris, 1936). I follow the recent German translation of the Nubia passages by Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 46-57, but have made some slight adaptations with the help of J.J. van Ginkel by checking Richter's translation against the Syriac text edited by Brooks. Cf. the earlier German translation of the passages by F. Althelm, R. Stiehl (eds), *Die Araber in der Alten Welt*, 6 vols (Berlin, 1964-9) 4.319-33. On the unreliable English translation by G. Vantini, *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia* (Heidelberg and Warsaw, 1975) 6-23, see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 42 (n. 3).

first five chapters probably concentrated on the Monophysites before 566. The central theme immediately after the first Nubia passage is the dispute between the Alexandrian clergy and James Bar'adai on the one hand, and Paul of Antioch on the other until 581 (chapters 10-48). John then introduces the second Nubia passage in chapters 49-53, after which he continues the story of the dispute until 584/585 (chapters 54-61).⁶⁹ Let us briefly survey the contents of the Nubia passages.

At the start of chapter 6, John gives a brief summary of its contents. We learn that this chapter is 'about the barbarian people of the Noubades, who converted to Christianity, and about the cause of their conversion'.⁷⁰ John here provides some other interesting details about the Noubades.⁷¹ According to him, they 'dwelled on the eastern frontier (area) of the Thebaid'.⁷² He further says that they were paid in order to prevent them from raiding into Egypt, which confirms Procopius' statement: 'they (that is, the Blemmyes and Noubades) receive this (gold) right down to my day'.⁷³

Immediately preceding chapter 6, John informs us that a priest called Longinus had taken over Theodosius' duties in celebrating the Eucharist because the patriarch was no longer able to do so. Thereupon, Theodosius had appointed Longinus as bishop of the Noubades.⁷⁴ The story therefore focuses on Longinus' second mission to Nubia, but without passing over an earlier mission by the priest Julian. This first story thus does not disturb the chronology of book 4, and serves to introduce Longinus' mission. Like Longinus, Julian was a Monophysite priest in Constantinople, where he developed the plan to convert the Noubades to Christianity.

There follows an amusing story of what can be described as a rally race between the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. Julian told Theodora about his ideas and the empress responded enthusiastically. In her enthusiasm, she told the emperor, but he, already having plans in that direction, sent a rival mission to Nubia. When Theodora heard of this she cleverly sent a letter to the governor (*dux*) of the Thebaid, in which she threatened to kill him if he let Justinian's delegation depart for Nubia first. The governor delayed the delegation of Justinian, which had arrived first, and took care that Theodora's missionaries left before the other delegation, pretending that Theodora's delegation had forced its way through.

After Julian had arrived first in the Kingdom of Noubadia, he read out a letter written by Theodora, offered the king gifts and instructed the Noubades. Subsequently, Julian informed them that the emperor had tried to persuade Theodosius of his doctrinal convictions and, when he did not succeed, had removed the archbishop from his patriarchal seat. After some time, the other delegation arrived with an imperial letter and gifts. They proclaimed that the Noubades had to follow the Church and ignore the other delegation, which had been expelled from the Church. The king of the Noubades answered that he would exchange gifts with the emperor but that he would not follow the imperial faith because the emperor had expelled Theodosius from his see, and he did not want to fall from 'paganism' into another malicious belief.

Julian stayed in Noubadia for two years, and in a rather fantastic scene it is said that he used to stand for hours with the people in holes filled up with water to their nostrils because of the heat.⁷⁵ Julian baptised the king, his notables and many people in his retinue. Another man in his company was a certain Theodore, a bishop from the Thebaid, who reappears in the second mission to Nubia. When Julian went back to

⁶⁹ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 75-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-8, 77-8, 98.

⁷⁰ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.1-2).

⁷¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 60-1.

⁷² Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.6-7). Cf. the remark in the *Life of Aaron*, fol. 26b, that the Noubades lived east and south-west of Philae.

⁷³ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.33 = *FHN* III 328.

⁷⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.5 Brooks (p. 182.22-5).

⁷⁵ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 68-9.

Constantinople, he left the Noubades to Theodore. In the presence of John of Ephesus, Theodora received Julian with great honour.

On his deathbed (566), the Patriarch Theodosius remembered Julian's mission to Nubia, the more so because Julian had only recently died, and Theodora had died, too. He commissioned Longinus to finish the project, that is, to fully convert the country, and ordained him bishop of Noubadia. However, after Theodosius had died, and Longinus was preparing himself to travel south, malicious men informed the emperor (at this time, Justin II) about Longinus' plans. The emperor prevented his departure for three years, but in the third year (in 569) the bald bishop escaped by wearing a wig. In Noubadia, he was received with hospitality. The new bishop built a church, created an ecclesiastical hierarchy and instructed the Noubades. He induced the king to send an embassy to Constantinople, in which the king praised Longinus with the following words: 'Though we were Christians in name, yet we did not learn what Christianity really was, until Longinus came to us'.⁷⁶ Among the audience was, again, John of Ephesus.

However, after about six years had passed (c. 575), the devil devised a plan to separate Longinus from his good deeds and bring about a schism in the Monophysite Church. Longinus received a letter from the Archpriest Theodosius and the Archdeacon Theodore, two prominent members of the Alexandrian clergy, in which they asked Longinus to come to a place near Alexandria and ordain a new archbishop of Alexandria. The Noubades tried to prevent their bishop from leaving but he was determined to go north. Passing through Philae, Longinus visited Bishop Theodore, who is first identified here as bishop of Philae. Longinus discussed the request with Theodore and asked him to accompany him. However, Theodore, who had been ordained bishop fifty years earlier under the Patriarch Timothy III (that is, around 525), was too old for such a trip. Nevertheless, he supplied Longinus with a letter in which he permitted Longinus to act in his place.

We now jump to chapter 49, passing by several chapters of disputes between the Monophysite leaders concerning the appointment of a new patriarch of Alexandria. Here, John takes up the storyline of the first Nubia passage by summarising chapters 6-9. John announces that he will relate the conversion of the people of the Alodiai to Christianity. These people lived further to the south and were one of the three Christian kingdoms that had emerged in the realm of the former Kingdom of Meroe during the sixth century: Alodia (Alwa), Makouria and Noubadia.⁷⁷ Apparently, John saw the conversion of Alodia as a consequence of the conversion of Noubadia in the two earlier missions. As this third mission is less relevant, we will only briefly summarise its contents here.

Having heard of Longinus' deeds in Noubadia, the Alodiai asked Longinus to instruct and baptise them, but the disputes described in chapters 10-4 kept the bishop busy elsewhere. When the king of Alodia sent envoys to ask Longinus again to come to his country, the 'Alexandrians' tried to blacken Longinus' reputation.⁷⁸ But the Alodiai did not believe the accusations. Thereupon, the 'Alexandrians' sent an embassy to Alodia consisting of two bishops who proclaimed that Longinus had been removed from his see and that they came to baptise the Alodiai. But again the Alodiai did not listen and wanted Longinus to baptise them.

In 579/580, Longinus was back in Noubadia and started his journey to Alodia. Due to the heat and the hostile lands of the king of Makouria, 17 camels and the rest

⁷⁶ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.8 Brooks (p. 188.6-8).

⁷⁷ See, most recently, Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 24-30, and Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 212-55.

⁷⁸ From the context, it appears that 'Alexandrians' means the same clergymen who opposed the appointment of Theodore as archbishop of Alexandria in 575. See Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 80-2.

of the animals died, and Longinus and all his companions suffered from illness.⁷⁹ When they arrived at the frontiers of Alodia, Longinus and his men were received in a most friendly manner. Longinus baptised the king and his notables, and many other people. Out of thankfulness, the king of Alodia sent a letter to the king of Noubadia, called *ἄνρωπυλῆ*, which John cites. He also includes an extract of a letter by Longinus to the Noubadian king, in which he describes his mission. Finally, John quotes an extract of a letter by the Noubadian king himself to the Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria, in which he related the same events.⁸⁰

The Nubia passages written by John of Ephesus have been so much discussed and referred to in past scholarship that we shall discuss only the most important contributions to the debate here.⁸¹ Thus far, scholars have mainly concentrated on two, interrelated problems concerning the missions to Nubia: 1. The reliability of John of Ephesus' *Church History* as a historical source, and 2. The struggle between Chalcedonians and Monophysites to convert the Nubian kingdoms to Christianity. Surprisingly, as with Procopius, no scholar has attempted to ask the questions why John included the Nubia passages in the third part of his *Church History* at all, and how this affects their interpretation.⁸²

Every student of the missions to Nubia described by John of Ephesus should start with the excellent article about Bishop Theodore of Philae written by Jean Maspero (1885-1915) in 1909.⁸³ Among many other interesting details concerning the dating of the closure of the temple of Isis, the missions to Nubia and the life of Theodore, to which we will return later, Maspero believed John's claim that Nubia became Monophysite in a brief period of time. He also discarded later sources, especially the tenth-century Patriarch Eutychius, who reported that Nubia became Monophysite only in the seventh century.⁸⁴ He thus concluded: 'Nubia, evangelised by the Jacobites (that is, the Monophysites, who were called after James Bar'adaï), was kept by them, and has never known the Catholic faith (that is, according to the doctrine of Chalcedon)'.⁸⁵

In a German dissertation on the origins of Nubian Christianity in 1930, Johann Kraus opposed this view and was more critical of John of Ephesus' account. Moreover, in addition to Eutychius he adduced John's contemporary John of Biclarum, who states that the Kingdom of Makouria became Christian in 569, probably meaning Chalcedonian. According to Kraus, Monophysite success was not as thorough as John suggests, and the imperial delegation succeeded in converting Makouria to Chalcedonianism. This would also explain why John states that the king of Makouria was hostile to Longinus on his journey via Makouria to Alodia. Hence, the partiality of John, who gave only the Monophysite side of the story, was underlined.⁸⁶

Some years later, an eminent scholar of Nubian Christianity, Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881-1954), went even further along this road. He based himself, in addition

⁷⁹ In his version of the event, the king of the Noubades claims that he sent Longinus to a Blemmyan king, who helped the bishop to reach Alodia. As it is said that the king of Makouria guarded all land until the Red Sea, this seems to confirm the traditional picture that the Blemmyes inhabited the Eastern Desert. See Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXIII at 57 ('Notes on the Topography of the Christian Nubian Kingdoms', 1935').

⁸⁰ For a detailed comparison of the letters and their authenticity see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 85-90.

⁸¹ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 20-7.

⁸² Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-8, 77-8, summarises the context but does not raise these questions.

⁸³ Maspero, 'Théodore'. Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-114, who in his discussion of the chronology of the missions to Nubia omits any reference to Maspero, although he bases himself on most of the chronology established by this scholar.

⁸⁴ Maspero, 'Théodore', 315-7. Cf. J. Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1923) 233-5.

⁸⁵ Maspero, 'Théodore', 317.

⁸⁶ Kraus, *Anfänge*, 54-77.

to the literary sources, on the formulae of the Nubian epitaphs, which seemed to be inspired by mainstream Byzantine liturgy and were different from the Egyptian ones. This would imply that the Noubades were predominantly Chalcedonian at this time.⁸⁷ In an excellent review of Monneret de Villard's book, however, it was shown that these epitaphs cannot say anything about doctrinal preferences. In fact, the same literary sources have been used in order to argue the opposite, namely that Nubadia was indeed Monophysite first.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, excavations shed new light on Christian Nubia. These data were used by Sir Laurence Kirwan (1907-1999), one of the excavators of the tombs at Ballana and Qustul and a student of Christian Nubia well ahead of his time, to counterbalance the evidence of the literary sources.⁸⁹ Accordingly, he divided the conversion of Nubia into two phases: the first phase, in which Nubia became influenced by Christianity through exchange with Egypt, and the second phase, in which Byzantine missions definitively organised Christianity in the region.⁹⁰ Apparently, Nubia did not become Christian as abruptly as John of Ephesus wants us to believe.

Kirwan also made another important observation. Viewing Byzantine missions as imperial foreign policy, he shed doubt on the sharp division between Monophysitism and Chalcedonianism as drawn by Monneret de Villard (and, hence, regarding the whole previous discussion on the subject): 'Monneret de Villard, distracted perhaps by the account of the race so picturesquely described by John of Ephesus, attached an exaggerated importance to this division; fundamental though it was in theological terms, it never shattered the unity of the Empire. In so doing he failed to stress the primary function of these imperial missions from the City of Constantine. This was not exclusively or even primarily religious. It was diplomatic and cultural'.⁹¹

Finally, Kirwan refers to Procopius' pamphlet the *Secret History* (completed in 550/551),⁹² which states that the emperor and his wife took opposite views in religious matters to divide their opponents, but neither undertook anything separately.⁹³ This is so reminiscent of the rally race between Justinian and Theodora that, if we were to take Procopius literally, the Chalcedonian mission to Nubia could never have taken place. In conclusion, Kirwan therefore asks himself the question why the imperial delegation, if fictional, was mentioned at all: 'it (John's account of the missions to

⁸⁷ Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 61-70. Cf. H. Junker, 'Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens', *ZÄS* 60 (1925) 111-48; Munier, 'Christianisme', 44 (n. 4); Engelhardt, *Mission*, 57-71; Adams, *Nubia*, 438-47; Demicheli, 'Regni', 191-5; Vantini, *Christianity*, 36-43; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 278-82; W. Godlewski, 'A New Approach to the Christianization of Makuria: An Archaeological Note', in C. Berger, G. Clerc, N. Grimal (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, 4 vols (Cairo, 1994) 2.169-76; Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XVI ('A Contemporary Account of the Conversion of the Sudan to Christianity, 1937'), Ch. XVII ('Christianity and the Kur'an', 1934¹), and Ch. XIX ('The Nature of Nubian Christianity', 1939¹); Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 32-3. In support of Monneret de Villard's thesis, W.Y. Adams, 'Architectural Evolution of the Nubian Church, 500-1400 AD', *JARCE* 4 (1965) 87-139, tried to demonstrate that the doctrinal opposition was visible in the archaeological remains, but this was convincingly rejected by M. Krause, 'Neue Quellen und Probleme zur Kirchengeschichte Nubiens', in F. Altheim, R. Stiehl (eds), *Christentum am Roten Meer*, 2 vols (Berlin and New York, 1971-3) 1.509-31 at 516-21. Cf. Adams, *Nubia*, 442-6.

⁸⁸ E. Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', *RHE* 36 (1940) 131-42 at 133-8.

⁸⁹ On Kirwan see the introduction to his *Studies* ix-xxi.

⁹⁰ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XX ('Some Thoughts on the Conversion of Nubia to Christianity', 1982¹), an expanded version of which, mainly concentrating on the archaeological finds, appeared as *Studies* Ch. XXI ('The Birth of Christian Nubia: Some Archaeological Problems', 1984¹).

⁹¹ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XX at 142. Cf. W.H.C. Frend, *Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1980) Ch. XXII ('The Mission to Nubia: An Episode in the Struggle for Power in Sixth Century Byzantium', 1975¹).

⁹² On the date see Cameron, *Procopius*, 9, 52-4; Greatrex, 'Dates of Procopius' Works', and *Rome and Persia*, 62.

⁹³ Procop. *Arc.* 10.15, 23, cf. 27.13.

Nubia) was not perhaps such a transparent piece of propaganda as Ugo Monneret de Villard appears to have thought'.⁹⁴

Recently, Siegfried Richter has provided a new German translation of the Nubia passages in John of Ephesus, followed by an elaborate commentary. It analyses several other sources relevant to the context of the missions, especially a collection of Monophysite documents which had never been connected with the Nubia passages before.⁹⁵ He rightly criticises previous interpretations which label elements in the passages as either 'trustworthy' or not, on the basis of which a judgement is made of the whole account.⁹⁶ Indeed, it would be impossible to come to general judgements in terms of 'trustworthiness' of the passages as a whole, for they are not a unity and have to be seen in their context. Therefore, while taking into account the Monophysite agenda of the work, Richter concentrates on the elements in the account separately and, after comparing them with other sources, such as inscriptions and archaeological evidence, decides on the level of their trustworthiness.⁹⁷ Consequently, the information about Theodore of Philae and Longinus he regards as trustworthy because it can be supported by other sources. On the other hand, the rally race between Justinian and Theodora is not reported elsewhere and is thus possible but not proven.⁹⁸ He concludes that 'neither for Noubadia nor Alodia is there any reason to have doubts about Monophysite missionary activities'.⁹⁹

Although Richter is undoubtedly heading in the right direction, he fails to take the literary aspects of the passages sufficiently into account.¹⁰⁰ An element in the account may seem 'trustworthy' when checked against another source, but it may at the same time be heavily distorted to fit it into its literary context. It is therefore useful, certainly in this case where a strong Monophysite emphasis is expected, to first decide about the message of the passages by looking at their wider context. Only afterwards can questions be raised concerning the trustworthiness of an element or elements. Having said this, let us now look once more at the Nubia passages.

To start with, the context indicates that the missions to Nubia are about Bishop Longinus.¹⁰¹ As already remarked, the first mission under Julian is seen only as a preamble to the second mission under Longinus. Immediately before the first mission is related, Longinus is said to have taken over 'Theodosius' ecclesiastical duties, which indicates his important role as protégé of the exiled archbishop. As the events in book 4 are told chronologically, the story of the first mission is a flashback on what 'went before'. The earlier mission is at the same time presented as the direct cause of the second mission, for Patriarch Theodosius, when he was about to die, remembered the earlier mission and sent Longinus to Nubia as a bishop. Thus the mission is sanctioned by one of the prominent leaders of Monophysitism.¹⁰²

After the second mission, John of Ephesus describes the major dissensions between Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrian clergy, and later between Paul and James Bar'adai, in which Longinus played an important role. When Longinus came to Egypt around 575 to choose a new patriarch of Alexandria, two Syrian bishops (John of Chalcis and George Urtâyâ) arrived to deliberate with Longinus about the

⁹⁴ Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XX at 145.

⁹⁵ For a review of Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, which also evaluates the translation from the Syriac, see J.H.F. Dijkstra and J.J. van Ginkel in *Muséon* 117 (2004) 233-7.

⁹⁶ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 25-7.

⁹⁷ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 32-40.

⁹⁸ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 111-2.

⁹⁹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 111.

¹⁰⁰ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 31-2, 34-5, does discuss the genre of the work and its general aim.

¹⁰¹ For Longinus, see Honigmann, *Évêques* 224-9; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 102-8.

¹⁰² Indeed, a letter from Theodosius to Paul of Antioch survives dated to 565, in which Theodosius, because of his bad health, asks Paul to consecrate Longinus bishop of the Noubades. See Honigmann, *Évêques* 225-6; A. van Roey, P. Allen, *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century* (Leuven, 1994) 278-9 (no. 18); Honigmann, *Évêques* 225-6.

conditional return of Paul of Antioch, who had fallen out of favour in his patriarchate. Longinus proposed that the bishops first consecrate a new patriarch of Alexandria. They found him in the person of Theodore, a Syrian monk, and ordained him. Although Paul did not participate in the consecration, he was probably not far away and started communicating with Theodore, as the patriarch of Antioch would normally do with the patriarch of Alexandria. The ordination, however, was not accepted by the Alexandrian clergy, who ordained a counter-patriarch, named Peter. These disputes, in the course of which James Bar'adai died (578), led to the tumultuous ordination of another Peter, Peter of Callinicum, as patriarch of Antioch in 581.¹⁰³

The success of Longinus' missions in Nubia forms a stark contrast with these disputes and this is probably the reason why John of Ephesus included them in book 4: if the Monophysites had stopped quarrelling they could have achieved what they did in Nubia. Moreover, Longinus' success in Nubia also puts his role in the disputes in a favourable light. For example, it explains why he was not more frequently present at these affairs, as Theodore of Alexandria complained.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the activities of Longinus in Nubia are certainly not meant to make up for his appointment of Theodore. John does not condemn the appointment, but he blames the 'Alexandrians' for having started and continued the disputes. This is also apparent from the third mission, in which the conversion of Alodia is delayed by them. Longinus' role in the disputes is thus portrayed by John as basically a good one, and his activities in Nubia confirm this. Significantly, at the end book 4 John does not write about Monophysite successes but about their disputes, and in particular about the sad death of Paul of Antioch, who had been relegated to the sidelines, in 581. Paul is said to have lived in the mountains for four years and to have died in a nunnery. With the missions to Nubia, John therefore wanted to hold up to his audience a mirror of what the Monophysite church should have been doing, instead of quarrelling with each other.

Consequently, John of Ephesus makes the Monophysite success in Nubia, and that of Longinus in particular, as glorious as possible. Two champions of Monophysitism play a key role in the success in Nubia. The first person is Theodosius of Alexandria, who instigated the second mission to Nubia and the ordination of Longinus. John even makes an explicit Monophysite statement in connection with Theodosius on the first mission under Julian. The Noubadian king accepted the Monophysite delegation because Theodosius had persisted in the 'true faith', until the emperor removed him from his see. This statement is in line with the goal of the *Church History*, for John claimed that the Monophysite movement preserved the doctrine of the true, orthodox church.¹⁰⁵

Significantly, a second champion of Monophysitism, the Empress Theodora, received Theodosius with hospitality in Constantinople. The role of Theodora as protectress of Monophysitism can also be found in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, for example in the story of John of Hephaestopolis. Pretending to be ill, this bishop, protected by the Empress Theodora, managed to keep out of the hands of Chalcedonian enemies and to continue his mission for the Monophysite cause. It is much the same with Longinus. The emperor kept him in Constantinople for three years, but Longinus escaped by wearing a wig.¹⁰⁶ The motif of the protection of

¹⁰³ See the accounts by Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches*, 212-49, 278-317; T. Hermann, 'Patriarch Paul von Antiochia und das alexandrinische Schisma vom Jahre 575', *ZNW* 27 (1928) 263-304; E.W. Brooks, 'The Patriarch Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrine Schism of 575', *BZ* 30 (1929-30) 468-76; Honigmann, *Évêques*, 232-5; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 326-8; Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295, 298-300; Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 75-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 77-8, 98.

¹⁰⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.48, 55 Brooks (p. 232.13-29, 243.27-8).

¹⁰⁵ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ In 568, Longinus signed a letter from the Monophysite bishops residing in Constantinople to the Church in the East. See Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 281-3 (no. 25), 284-5 (no. 31). He also

Theodora returns in the passages on Nubia, although not in the second mission under Longinus because the empress had already died by then. Nonetheless, Theodora was the instigator of the first mission to Nubia under Julian and she took care that the Monophysite embassy was the first to arrive in Noubadia.

In view of this representation of Monophysite success in Nubia, to what extent is the rivalry race between Justinian and Theodora also distorted? On the basis of what we know of Byzantine missions, it is hardly credible that a rival mission between the emperor and empress would have taken place. The emperor's decisions were far more pragmatic than portrayed by John and would have allowed a foreign mission led by Monophysites, just as Justinian supported the Monophysite Ghassanids against the Persians.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, we have seen that Byzantine missions were primarily aimed at transmitting Byzantine culture, not specific doctrines.

In this respect, it may be significant to refer to the parallel Kirwan drew with the passage from Procopius' *Secret History*, where the emperor and his wife are said to have maintained a divide and rule policy against their enemies. In the *Secret History*, Theodora is stereotyped as a dangerous woman scheming behind the scenes. In John's works, Theodora's role is more positive as a guardian of the Monophysite movement. Nevertheless, John seems to have known of Procopius' stereotyping of Theodora, as appears from the passage in which the empress forces the governor of the Thebaid to support her delegation to Nubia.¹⁰⁸ It is thus also perfectly possible that John was inspired by sources like the *Secret History*, in which the imperial couple was said to take opposite views in religious matters. He used them for his account of the first mission to Nubia by letting the rivalry race between emperor and empress end in a glorious Monophysite victory. John's account of the first mission seems to have a clear ideological message.¹⁰⁹

It is therefore more likely that the story of the rivalry race between Justinian and Theodora should be seen as a literary invention by the author to support his activism for the Monophysite cause. The emperor probably instigated one mission from political considerations, and this mission would not have been primarily intended to fix the doctrine of Monophysitism in Nubia. Bearing this interpretation of the missions to Nubia by John of Ephesus in mind, as well as the passage on the closure of the Isis temple by Procopius, we will now try to see how they relate to each other.

The Nubia Passages by Procopius and John of Ephesus Compared

Thus far, the passages by Procopius and John have been combined almost without being based on sound grounds, so that the definitive conversion of Nubia has been seen as a logical result of the closure of the temples, first of all the temple of Isis, at Philae. Maspero already saw a connection between the events described by Procopius and John: 'the expedition of Narses had no doubt focused the attention of the Christian world on Nubia'.¹¹⁰ Other scholars, arguing further, saw a direct, causal relationship between the events, instigated by a deliberate, 'anti-pagan' policy of the emperor.

These scholars even adduced the victory of the Noubadian king Silko over the Blemmyes, which they believed dated to the sixth century, to support their point of view. They argued that the Byzantine elements in his triumphal inscription at Kalabsha demonstrated that Silko had diplomatic ties with the Byzantine Empire, and

attended a meeting of Monophysite bishops in Constantinople in 569. See Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts* 288-90 (no. 39). See further Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 104-7.

¹⁰⁷ See Cameron, *Procopius*, 125-6, and *Mediterranean World*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (pp. 183.26-184.7), on which see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 63-4.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Cameron, *Procopius*, 76-80; Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 151-3; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 560-1; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 37-9, 111.

¹¹⁰ Maspero, 'Théodore', 303.

in this favourable position conquered the Blemmyes in battle. According to them, this feat led Justinian to order his general Narses to close the temples at Philae and make a definitive end to the 'pagan' cults. In turn, the closure of the temples cleared the way for the conversion of Nubia, which took place soon afterwards.¹¹¹ Other scholars have dated the Silko inscription to after the closure of the temples,¹¹² or, even, to after the mission to Nubia under Julian.¹¹³ They all believed that the king converted in the first mission to Nubia was Silko.

The discovery of the letter of Phonen to Abourni in 1976 has proven this sequence of events to be wrong. As the Silko inscription dates back to the fifth century, there can be no direct relationship with the events described by Procopius and John. Despite this warning of the dangers of simply combining events, Richter still takes a close relationship between the closure of the temples at Philae and the missions to Nubia for granted. He even devotes a whole chapter to the conversion of Philae to Christianity, but never even questions the nature of the relationship between both sources under consideration: these events simply belong together.¹¹⁴

However, the question needs to be asked why an historical account, not even about a conversion but only about the closure of temples, and a history of the Church about missionary activities, in which the see of Philae plays an important role but no temples are mentioned, should belong together at all. Could it be that the closure of the temples at Philae was mentioned in the second, now lost part of John of Ephesus' *Church History*? This is unlikely, as John often depends for the events he did not experience personally on the writer of the first Christian chronicle of the world, John Malalas, and this author does not say anything about Philae.¹¹⁵ John seems to have inserted the mission under Julian in the third part of his *Church History* for the first time, as he does not refer back to a previous account. Apparently in his *Church History* John did not connect the closure of the temples at Philae with the missions to Nubia. It therefore seems likely that there is no necessary relationship between the two events either. On the other hand, there is no doubt that both accounts draw on historical events.

It has been suggested that in the 540s Procopius did not yet know the effects of the imperial policy concerning the southern Egyptian frontier and that he only recorded the first symbolic act in a lengthy process, whereas John was looking back on the events; in other words, that this different perspective resulted in two different accounts.¹¹⁶ This may well have been the case. If there is a connection between the two events, they should be seen as part of a series of imperial measures concerning the southern Egyptian frontier. In order to understand the background to the missionary activities, we have to pay some attention to the progression of Christianity in Nubia.

As a result of formal and informal contacts with Egypt, Byzantine culture, and therewith Christianity, reached Nubia before the sixth century. Further south, the Kingdom of Axum had already converted in the fourth century, allegedly through the efforts of Frumentius. In addition, we have seen some examples of Christian influence

¹¹¹ Kraus, *Anfänge*, 107-9, 137-8; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53-60; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire. II: De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476-565)* (Paris, 1949) 300-2; Honigmann, *Évêques*, 225; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 48-51; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 191, and 'Regni', 185-6; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 273; H. Suermann, 'Der Bericht des Johannes von Ephesos über die Missionierung der Nubier im sechsten Jahrhundert', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998) 303-13 at 310.

¹¹² Maspero, 'Théodore', 301-2.

¹¹³ Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 299-300, *Town and Country*, Ch. XXII at 10-1, and Ch. XXIV at 20 ('Recently Discovered Materials for Writing the History of Christian Nubia, 1975').

¹¹⁴ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 115-38, 192, on which see Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236.

¹¹⁵ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 65. On Malalas see E. Jeffreys, with B. Croke, R. Scott (eds), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990); E. Jeffreys, 'The Beginning of Byzantine Chronography: John Malalas', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 497-527.

¹¹⁶ Cameron, *Procopius*, 121 (n. 54).

in fifth-century documents from the Dodekaschoinos. In the Phonen letter, one of the sons of the Noubadian chief Abourni had the Christian name Mouses.¹¹⁷ In the Tantani letters, we saw a Noubadian chieftain corresponding with a monk from Philae also called Mouses.¹¹⁸ In addition, several objects with crosses and Christian inscriptions have been found in the tombs at Ballana, dating to the fifth century. Although the latter may have been spoils, the evidence suggests that Christian culture had reached Nubia well before the sixth century. Consequently, conversion to Christianity may not have been such a large step for the Noubadian king of the first mission to Nubia, the more so because by doing so he could win or renew the ties with a powerful ally. Thus, for the convert king political considerations were probably more important than religious, let alone doctrinal, predilections.¹¹⁹

The missions to Nubia seem to have been a continuation of the imperial policy concerning the southern frontier during the fifth century. In this century, several treaties were concluded with the Noubades to stop them from raiding into Egypt. They probably had the status of federates and received special grants, such as a yearly payment and access to the temple island of Philae, according to Procopius and John of Ephesus even as late as Justinian's reign. The emperor seems to have opted for renewing the federate relationship with a gradually emerging Noubadian Kingdom. True, the shape such a relationship could take was dressed in Christian language, but doctrine was not the main issue.¹²⁰

The events as described by Procopius and John should therefore be seen in the general context of Byzantine imperial policy. The fact that two imperial missions were sent to Nubia indicates the interest of the emperor in this region immediately to the south of the Egyptian frontier. He may already have had an eye on the area when he gave the order to close the languishing temples at Philae in the 530s, an interest that may be reflected in John's description of the reaction of the emperor to the plans to send a mission to Nubia: '...he was not pleased, for he had planned to write to the Thebaid to his bishops (that is, the bishops of his doctrinal position), so that they would enter (the country), convert them (the Noubades) and plant the name of the synod (of Chalcedon) there'.¹²¹ Probably, the impact of the closure of the temples at Philae was minimal in connection with the missions to Nubia, and this would have been exactly the reason why John does not mention it. The active role of Philae in Nubia was rather a practical one: being the nearest see, the bishop of Philae was the right man in the right place to participate in the missions.

The Role of Philae in the Missions to Nubia

Even today, Philae is seen as the last in the chain of the conversion of Egypt to Christianity, spreading the faith from north (Alexandria) to south (Philae). Thus, the closure of the temples at Philae was regarded as the end point of this process, and the starting point of the conversion of the area to its immediate south: Nubia. We have already stressed, however, that this was not how conversion worked. Philae already

¹¹⁷ *SB* XIV 11957.2 = *FHN* III 319.

¹¹⁸ Cairo, Coptic Museum reg. no. 76/50B [bis] 1 = *FHN* 322.

¹¹⁹ For similar choices of kings converting to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, see N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings. Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester and New York, 1997). Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 141-8, who, despite his mentioning this evidence, underestimates the impact of Christianity before the missions to Nubia, on which see P.O. Scholz, review Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, *OC* 87 (2003) 248-54; Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236. See also Kirwan, *Studies*, Chs. XX and XXI, Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 38, and Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 217-8.

¹²⁰ Cf. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 116-7, who suggests that the Monophysite doctrine would have been easier to explain than the Chalcedonian doctrine.

¹²¹ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.19-21).

had an episcopal see in the first half of the fourth century, and this shows that by that time the Church had organised itself as in the rest of Egypt.

It is precisely in this light that we have to see Philae's role in the missions to Nubia. Philae was the see on the frontier between Egypt and Nubia and had had contact with the other side of the frontier for ages. As the last station on the way to Nubia, it would seem natural for an imperial mission to contact the bishop of this see and to ask him to support the mission. And that is exactly what Theodore did. It is remarkable how the relatively invisible see of Philae came to play such an active role in the history of the Egyptian Church during the sixth century. Part of the success definitely consisted of Theodore's partaking in the first mission to Nubia. But there may have been another reason. Let us therefore try to reconstruct Philae's role in the events before finally assessing why Theodore could play the role he did in the ecclesiastical affairs of the sixth century.

When Longinus was called to Alexandria around 575, on his way north he visited Bishop Theodore at Philae. The bishop, so John of Ephesus says, was already fifty years in office and had been ordained by the Monophysite Archbishop Timothy III of Alexandria (517-535).¹²² Theodore's ordination, then, took place around 525, and he was already bishop of Philae when Narses the Persarmenian arrived at Philae. By following the latter's traces in Procopius' *Wars*, we can determine the period in which Narses visited Philae.

Narses came from Persian Armenia and possibly belonged to the influential family of the Kamsarakan. This is why he is sometimes called Narses Kamsarakan, for earlier sources mention a person of the same name who belonged to this family.¹²³ We should be careful, however, because another Narses, a eunuch with whom our Narses is often confused, also came from Persarmenia and with the title of *cubicularius* became even more influential at Justinian's court.¹²⁴

Our Narses is already mentioned in the first book of the *Persian Wars* when he was still fighting for the Persians and gained victory over the Byzantine generals Belisarius and Sittas in Persarmenia in 525/526.¹²⁵ Procopius already looks ahead here by stating that Narses would later desert to the Romans and fight with his present enemy, Belisarius, in Italy.¹²⁶ The passage concerning Narses' desertion to the Romans, which took place in the summer of 530, follows three chapters later and there explicitly refers back to the earlier battle with Belisarius. His compatriot Narses *cubicularius* welcomed Narses' desertion with a large sum of money.¹²⁷

In his description of the closure of the temples at Philae, Procopius refers back to Narses' desertion. It is not clear what function Narses had during his expedition to Philae. He is called rather vaguely 'head of the troops there' (τῶν ἐκεῖνη στρατιωτῶν ἄρχων),¹²⁸ and it has been proposed that Justinian had made him the highest authority in the province, governor (*dux*) of the Thebaid, who was the main person responsible for the army garrisoned on the southern frontier. It also possible, however, that he was appointed as the actual commander of the garrisons in the region.¹²⁹

In the *Gothic Wars*, Procopius describes Narses' participation in the Italian campaign under Belisarius and Narses *cubicularius*, from the summer of 538 until at

¹²² Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189.13-4).

¹²³ Stein, *Histoire*, 292 (n. 1); Nautin, 'Conversion', 3; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

¹²⁴ *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 1'. For example, as Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133, rightly observes, Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53, confuses Narses the Persarmenian with Narses *cubicularius*.

¹²⁵ Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 147-8.

¹²⁶ Procop. *Pers* 1.12.21-2.

¹²⁷ Procop. *Pers* 1.15.31.

¹²⁸ Procop. *Pers* 1.19.37 = *FHN* III 328.

¹²⁹ Cf. R. Rémondon, 'Soldats de Byzance d'après un papyrus trouvé à Edfou', *RechPap* 1 (1961) 41-93 at 47, with Maspero, *Organisation militaire*, 82; Nautin, 'Conversion', 6; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 192-3 (n. 89), and 'Regni', 187; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

least late 540, when Belisarius sent him away from Ravenna with some other commanders.¹³⁰ Maspero therefore concluded that Narses had closed the temples at Philae between 530 and 538, and even placed the event around 535, when there was a relative period of peace 'which gave Justinian the opportunity of using one of his most esteemed officers for such an infamous job as the destruction of some idols at Philae'.¹³¹

However, in 543 Narses appears again as a commander of the Roman troops in the East where he died in a Persian ambush.¹³² Therefore, there are two periods of time in which he could have closed the temples at Philae: between 530 and 538 or in the years 541/542.¹³³ However, when Belisarius sent Narses away from Ravenna, it is not said that the latter left Italy. On the contrary, after Belisarius himself left Italy at the end of 540, Narses probably stayed behind as one of the commanders.¹³⁴ In 543, he was commander of an army of Armenians and Heruli, so it would have been highly unlikely for him to have come to southern Egypt sometime during the short period of 541/542. More probably, he stayed in Italy and was ordered to move to Persia with his army in 543 or even earlier. Thus, 530-538 still seems the most likely period for the closure of the temple of Isis at Philae. Yet, the question remains why this general was in Egypt at that time. Perhaps the answer can be found in reconstructing the dates of the first mission to Nubia.

The first mission to Nubia must have ended in or before 548, for John of Ephesus states that Julian stayed for two years in Noubadia and was received afterwards in Constantinople by the Empress Theodora, who died in 548.¹³⁵ If we are to believe John, he was present himself at that time to hear about the stories of Julian, and as John came to Constantinople in 540, we may deduce that Julian did not return to the capital before 540.¹³⁶

There is more circumstantial evidence for the year in which Julian went to Nubia because we know Julian was in Constantinople in the 'synod' (Syriac ܡܬܘܠܕܘܬܐ, from Greek σύνοδος) of the Patriarch Theodosius.¹³⁷ Richter proposes to emend the Syriac text in order to read the rendering of Greek συνουσία, ܠܘܬܘܣܝܐ, a word used for the circle around Theodosius.¹³⁸ Like John of Hephaestopolis, Julian would then have come in the retinue of the patriarch from Alexandria to Constantinople. However, this emendation is not necessary, as the word 'synod' was used for the permanent, standing synod of Monophysite bishops and other prominent clergymen visiting or residing in Constantinople.¹³⁹ The remark that Julian was 'in the synod of Theodosius' therefore indicates that Julian belonged to the more prominent members of the Monophysites in Constantinople. Possible though it may still be, the word 'synod' cannot be taken to mean that Julian came with Theodosius to Constantinople. Whether Julian came from Alexandria or not, it is evident from this remark that Julian could only have been sent to Nubia after Theodosius had arrived in Constantinople and become the leader of the Monophysites there.

¹³⁰ Procop. *Goth.* 2.13.17, 16.21, 18.6, 26.3, 27.16, 29.29.

¹³¹ Maspero, 'Théodore', 302. See also his *Histoire des patriarches* 34.

¹³² Procop. *Pers.* 2.24.12, 25.11, 25.20-4, 26.

¹³³ For the latter date see *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'. Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53, who dates the event to either 536-8 or 540-3, on which see Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133.

¹³⁴ Procop. *Goth.* 2.30.2. See Maspero, 'Théodore', 302; Nautin, 'Conversion', 4; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

¹³⁵ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.11-26).

¹³⁶ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 112.

¹³⁷ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.3-4).

¹³⁸ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 58-60: 'im Gefolge des Papa Theodosius'.

¹³⁹ Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 235. For this meaning of 'synod' see A. Papadakis, 'Endemousa synodos', in A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols (New York and Oxford, 1991) 1.697.

When did this happen? After Timothy III had died on 7 February 535, Theodosius was elected as archbishop of Alexandria a few days later. Just as with the schism of 575, the Alexandrian clergy created an anti-patriarch, Gaianus. Chaotic times followed until Justinian sent Narses *cubicularius* to Alexandria to capture Gaianus (23 or 25 May 535) and protect Theodosius. Finally, Theodosius was 'invited' to Constantinople, probably after the council held there in May/June of 536, which was convoked against some of the Monophysite leaders, to discuss doctrinal matters with the emperor.¹⁴⁰ The emperor forced Theodosius to stay in Constantinople, deposed him of his see and banished him to Derkos in Thrace, possibly from the end of 537 to 538. In 539, Theodosius returned to Constantinople where he lived as leader of the Monophysite movement until his death in 566, despite his removal from the patriarchal see.¹⁴¹

According to Maspero, Julian could have been sent to Nubia only after Theodosius' banishment, a period which he dates somewhere between 540 and 545. Maspero further suggests that the mission under Julian may have taken place in the same year, 543, as Theodore of Arabia was sent to the Arabs.¹⁴² Yet there is no necessary connection between the two events.¹⁴³ As Julian is said to have stayed for two years in Nubia, any date between May/June of 536 and 546, except for the short period of banishment in 537/538, is possible as a starting date for the first mission to Nubia. To sum up, this mission must have taken place somewhere between 536 and 548.

The only meaningful connection between the closure of the temples at Philae (530-538) and the first mission to Nubia (536-548) must be sought in the period of overlap between the events. It is tempting to think that Narses the Persarmenian accompanied Narses *cubicularius* to Alexandria in 535/536 to restore order, as he also accompanied his compatriot in the Italian campaign of 538-540.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, Narses *cubicularius* could have sent him to the southern Egyptian frontier. As a symbolic gesture, Narses the Persarmenian then closed the languishing temple of Isis, and soon returned to Alexandria, in any case before 538 when he was in Italy. Thus, the closure of the temples at Philae can tentatively be dated to the period 535-537.¹⁴⁵

It is possible that after the arrival of Theodosius and his retinue in Constantinople, Julian heard of this event and his attention was drawn to the area south of Philae. At the start of Theodosius' stay in Constantinople (536/537), when Justinian was still trying to solve problems with words, the emperor may have been attracted by the idea of sending an imperial mission to Nubia, which would have arrived there in around 538. If Julian had returned to Constantinople in 540, this would also fit the remark by John of Ephesus that he witnessed him there, for John was in the capital from 540 onwards. This, then, could be a plausible, if rather indirect, connection between the events described by Procopius and John.

According to John, Bishop Theodore of Philae accompanied Julian to the king of Noubadia. After he had stayed in Nubia for two years and had baptised the king, Julian left Noubadia to Theodore.¹⁴⁶ In the summary at the start of the second mission

¹⁴⁰ On the synod of May/June 536 at Constantinople see J. Speigl, 'Die Synode von 536 in Konstantinopel', *OS* 43 (1994) 105-53; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 110.

¹⁴¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 108-12. Cf. E.W. Brooks, 'The Dates of the Alexandrine Patriarchs Dioskoros II, Timothy IV, and Theodosius', *BZ* 12 (1903) 494-7; Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches* 102-34; Stein, *Histoire* 382-5; A. van Roey, 'Les débuts de l'Église jacobite', in A. Grillmeier, H. Bacht (eds), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3 vols (Würzburg, 1951-4) 2.338-60 at 352-5; Nautin, 'Conversion', 4-5; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 270-4.

¹⁴² Maspero, 'Théodore', 302-4, and *Histoire des patriarches* 234; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 54-5, 61; Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms* 32; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 216.

¹⁴³ As Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133, observes.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. E.R. Hardy, 'The Egyptian Policy of Justinian', *DOP* 22 (1968) 23-41 at 32-6, followed by Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 117, who take Narses the Persarmenian, who closed the temples at Philae, as the same person who restored order in Alexandria.

¹⁴⁵ Maspero, 'Théodore', 303; Nautin, 'Conversion', 5.

¹⁴⁶ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.11-21).

to Nubia, John says even more about Theodore's stay in Nubia: 'He, this bishop, entered (the country), visited them (the Noubades), instructed them and returned to his city. They were in this situation for a period of more or less eighteen years'.¹⁴⁷ What follows is the second mission to Nubia, which Longinus undertook in 569. Theodore, then, returned to Philae eighteen years earlier, that is, in 551.

How should we imagine his stay in Noubadia? First of all, it is unlikely that Theodore left his see permanently for at least four years. It is more probable that he stayed in contact with the now Christian king of Noubadia and stimulated, for example, church building and the ordination of clergymen, although these achievements John of Ephesus ascribes to the episcopate of Longinus.¹⁴⁸ An illustration of Theodore's activity in Nubia is the so-called Eirpanome inscription from Dendur:¹⁴⁹

- By the will of God and the command
of King Eirpanome and the zealot
in the word of God, Joseph, **exarch**
of Talmis, and by receiving the cross
5. from Theodore, Bishop of Philae,
I, Abraham, most humble priest,
have erected the cross on the day
on which the foundations were laid of this church,
on 27 Tybi of the 7th indiction
10. in the presence of Shai, the eunuch, Papnute,
the '**stepharis**' (?), Epephanios (sic), the '**domesticus**
and Sirma, the '**veredarius**'. Everyone who
will read the things written, let him be so good
to say a prayer for me. Amen.

This Coptic inscription, found in the temple of Dendur 70 km south of Philae, commemorates the erection of the cross by Abraham on the occasion of the building of a church inside the temple. The transformation has been ordered by the Noubadian king Eirpanome and Joseph, the exarch (ἑξάρχος) of Talmis, a high Noubadian official who is also mentioned in a building inscription from Ikhmindi (Mehendi, situated near Maharraqa, just south of the Dodekaschoinos).¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the text says that Abraham received the cross from Theodore, bishop of Philae, and that the ceremony was attended by four officials with a strange mixture of titles that betray the influence of Byzantine administration (CIOYΡ, 'eunuch': Coptic, CTEΦAPIC, '**stepharis**': ?, CΑΜΑΤΑ, '**domesticus**': Old Nubian, and ΒΕΡΙΤΑΡΙΟC, '**veredarius**': Latin).¹⁵¹

The inscription is dated to 27 Tybi of the 7th indiction, which could be 22 January of the years 529, 544, 559 or 574, because these dates fall in the episcopate of Theodore of Philae. The oldest date, 529, is improbable as it dates to before the first mission to Nubia, which arrived in 536 or later. If we are to believe John's account that the Noubadian king was baptised on that occasion, this date is impossible, for Eirpanome seems to already have been a Christian. The last date, 574, is also unlikely,

¹⁴⁷ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.49 Brooks (p. 233.27-30).

¹⁴⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.8 Brooks (p. 187.26-8).

¹⁴⁹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 164-72 (= *FHN* III 330), re-edits the text, with translation and commentary, which I follow here.

¹⁵⁰ For the *editio princeps* of this inscription, see S. Donadoni, *Cultura dell'antico Egitto* (Rome, 1986) 513-20 ('Un' epigrafe greco-nubiana da Ikhmindi', 1959') (= *SB* VIII 10074). See for discussion F.W. Deichmann, P. Grossmann, *Nubische Forschungen* (Berlin, 1988) 81-8; Bingen, *Pages d'épigraphie grecque* 160-2 ('Un roitelet chrétien des Nobades au VI^e siècle', 1961'); J. van der Vliet, 'Gleanings from Christian Northern Nubia', *JJP* 32 (2002) 175-94 at 191-4.

¹⁵¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 170; J. van der Vliet, review of Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* forthcoming. For the title *veredarius* see S. Daris, *Il lessico latino nel greco d'Egitto* (Barcelona, 1971) s.v. βερεδάριος (p. 33).

since Bishop Theodore was involved in the dedication, whereas Longinus was bishop of Noubadia from 566 onwards and would then have been expected to be responsible.¹⁵² Two dates remain: 544 and 559. Maspero rejected 544 because he suggested that Theodore was still in Nubia by then and would have presided over the ceremony himself. According to Maspero, the delegation of dedicating the church to the priest Abraham could have happened only after Theodore had returned to Philae in 551. Therefore, 559 would be the only option, and the bishop would have arranged the dedication of the church from Philae.¹⁵³

Recently, Richter has called this date, which has been accepted by almost all subsequent scholars, into question, precisely because after 551 Theodore had retreated to Philae and there was no longer a bishop in Noubadia. He claims that there are 'several grounds' for dating the event to 544 but only mentions that it falls in the period of the first mission, when Theodore accompanied Julian to Nubia (536-548). This argument is equally indecisive, however, for it is doubtful whether we should take John's statement that Theodore stayed for several years in Noubadia literally, and, after having returned to Philae in 551, cancelled all relations with Noubadia, including nearby Dendur. Nevertheless, whether the bishop was on Philae or in Nubia, it is tempting to relate the dedication of the church at Dendur to the first mission under Julian or shortly afterwards, when Theodore continued Julian's missionary activities.¹⁵⁴

A date of 544 does not contradict the suggestion that Julian went to Nubia in around 538 either. If he stayed for two years, he would have left the country to Theodore in 540. The bishop could have stayed for a few more years, or, more probably, he could have returned to his see and stimulated events such as the dedication of a church at Dendur from Philae. If this chronology is correct, it means that Eirpanome most probably was the Noubadian king who was baptised by Julian.¹⁵⁵ Whether the date of the inscription is 544 or 559, the Eirpanome inscription inevitably shows us that Nubia had been profoundly influenced by Byzantine administration before Longinus came south in 569, and that, *pace* John of Ephesus, church building and the creation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy had already taken shape before Longinus arrived.¹⁵⁶

We are on firmer grounds for the second mission. John states that Longinus was kept in Constantinople for three years and arrived in Noubadia in 569.¹⁵⁷ He then left for Alexandria after six years, that is, around 575, and returned to Noubadia before 579/580, when he undertook the third mission to Alodia. At the time Longinus was on his way to Egypt, Theodore's star had risen within the Monophysite movement. Longinus visited Philae and asked the bishop to participate in the ordination of a new

¹⁵² Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 69, and Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 37, who think that the inscription has to be dated to either 559 or 574.

¹⁵³ Maspero, 'Théodore', 305-10. Cf. Kraus, *Anfänge*, 111-4; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 84-6; Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 65-6; Demicheli, 'Regni', 195-8; Vantini, *Christianity*, 42-3; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 276. Again, Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 169-70, refers to Kraus for the date of 559, whereas Kraus, *Anfänge*, 112, explicitly refers to Maspero.

¹⁵⁴ The same seems to have happened at Talmis where an undated inscription mentions the priest Paulos who erected the cross in the temple of Mandulis. See Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 162-3.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches*, 287 (n. 4), and Honigmann, *Évêques*, 228-9 (n. 7), who identify Eirpanome with *ἄρρυωλζ*, king of Noubadia during the second mission under Longinus. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 92, leaves this question open.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 171-2, who unconvincingly argues that the Isis statue mentioned by Priscus F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318) was kept for oracular purposes at Dendur, and that Eirpanome violently made an end to this cult by converting the temple into a church. See Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236-7. On the motion oracle at Dendur ascribed to Amon of Debod, see R.S. Bianchi, 'The Oracle at the Temple of Dendur', in Clarysse, Schoors and Willems, *Egyptian Religion* 2, 773-80.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 216, mistakenly dates the event to 551.

archbishop of Alexandria. According to John of Ephesus, Theodore excused himself on account of his old age, but gave Longinus his mandate.¹⁵⁸

This document has indeed been preserved in a collection of 45 Monophysite documents, mostly letters, covering the period 564-575 (the *Documenta Monophysitica*). They have been transmitted in one manuscript which was probably copied not long after the last redaction in 580/581.¹⁵⁹ The letter by Theodore is included in one of these documents, a pamphlet in defence of Paul of Antioch.¹⁶⁰ In this letter, Theodore gives another reason why he did not accompany Longinus to Egypt: 'because of the treachery of those who now hold sway over the church'.¹⁶¹ John also does not tell that Theodore later resigned his mandate to Longinus in a letter which is referred to in the same document.¹⁶² The real reason, then, why Theodore did not come to Alexandria was the risk attached to ordaining the new archbishop, as appears from his later resignation.

John also states that in 575 the two Syrian bishops who came to Egypt to deliberate about Paul of Antioch, came for Longinus and Theodore. Longinus' important role should not surprise us, but why had Theodore become so important within the Monophysite movement? True, he had been actively involved in the first mission to Nubia and, undoubtedly, his name had been mentioned when Julian reported his mission at Constantinople.¹⁶³ But there may be another reason. John writes that already during Julian's first mission, Theodore was 'an old man',¹⁶⁴ and around 575 he was still 'the old bishop of Philae in the Upper Thebaid'.¹⁶⁵ Maspero calculated that he would have been born at the end of the fifth century, and would have been in his eighties when Longinus visited him.¹⁶⁶

Theodore had been appointed by Theodosius' predecessor Timothy III and had at least been ordained by a patriarch in normal office. No one could question Theodore's authority. His long episcopate and participation in the successful mission under Julian, which reached Constantinople in due time, would have contributed to Theodore's eminent place among the Monophysite Egyptian bishops. Another illustration of this prominence is the letter sent in 565 by Patriarch Theodosius to Theodore and the monks of Arcadia and the Thebaid, to three other Egyptian bishops (John of Kellia, Leonidas and Joseph of Metellis), and to the monks and clergy of Alexandria, in order to inform them that he had requested Paul of Antioch to consecrate new bishops at Alexandria.¹⁶⁷ Apparently, the number of Monophysite bishops had become few by the start of Justin II's reign, and Theodore was one of those remaining.¹⁶⁸ Besides being a prominent bishop in sixth-century Egypt, Theodore also left his mark upon his see. It is the work he did on Philae during his episcopate that is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189. 8-17).

¹⁵⁹ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 267-303. For a Latin translation, see J.-B. Chabot, *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas. II: Versio* (= *CSCO* 103; Paris, 1933).

¹⁶⁰ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295 (no. 43.6). See also Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 75-6.

¹⁶¹ *Documenta Monophysitica*, p. 274.29-30, cf. 274.21-2 Chabot (tr. Chabot, *Documenta*, 192.7-8, 1-2). Cf. Honigmann, *Évêques*, 227 (n. 2), who suggests that this remark refers to Bishop John of Kellia.

¹⁶² *Documenta Monophysitica*, p. 276.3-7 Chabot (tr. Chabot, *Documenta*, 193.1-5), on which see Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295, 298.

¹⁶³ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.21-6)

¹⁶⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.19). Cf. 4.49: 'a very old man' (p. 233.24).

¹⁶⁵ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189.9). Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 50, who inaccurately translates 'in der inneren Thebais', on which see Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 235.

¹⁶⁶ Maspero, 'Théodore', 299-300.

¹⁶⁷ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 279-80 (nos. 20-2).

¹⁶⁸ Honigmann, *Évêques*, 175.